



Lifting Life's Possibilities

ALABAMA * DMHMR Outlook

Fourth Quarter FY 07

FROM THE COMMISSIONER



In the midst of the daily challenges we face providing services through a diverse health care system, it is refreshing to pause and look at progress. September was National Alcohol and Substance Addiction Recovery month, and our Substance Addiction Services Division did a superb job assisting advocacy groups in organizing events to raise awareness about recovery. I had the opportunity to attend one of the events at a local church. More than 700 people were in attendance, and the service was devoted entirely to addiction recovery.

Mental Illness Awareness Week (MIAW) will be held across the country from October 7-13, 2007. The purpose of the observance is to educate the public about mental illness and to reduce the stigma that is so pervasive in our society. During this week, millions of Americans will learn about the challenges of having a mental illness. Others will celebrate the recoveries they or their loved ones are enjoying. The department will issue its own press release and help advocacy groups across the state spread the good news that mental illness is a treatable disease and that people in recovery deserve the same respect given to those who battle other types of illnesses.

The Mental Retardation Division is celebrating the fact that advocacy groups continue to grow and services expand for the individuals they serve. One highlight that is especially noteworthy is the formation of the MR Freedom of Choice Committee. The name says it all. The committee will examine and recommend ways of improving the system to give more choices to consumers and family members. Also, I would like to congratulate the three Alabamians who are now in China competing in the International Special Olympics World Games. You can read more about them further in this issue of *Outlook*.

There are many other initiatives underway that will positively affect the people we serve. Among these are the Community Needs Assessment meetings that will take place across the state this fall. Grass roots input from local stakeholders, consumers and family members will be "rolled up" to regional planning groups and finally to the department level. The results will be a comprehensive plan for long-term systems transformation. It is truly an exciting time to be involved in that process.

John M. Houston

Inside this Issue

Federal Mental Health Parity Legislation is Closer to a Reality.....2	Dr. Bisbee Retires After 33 Years with the Department.....4
Three Alabamians Travel to China to Compete in Special Olympics World Games.....3	Bell-Shambley and Cutts Appointed to New Positions.....5
Charley Pell Golf Tournament Provides Opportunity to Deliver Important Message.....3	Associate Commissioner for Substances Abuse Services Shares Progress6

Federal Mental Health Parity Legislation is Closer to a Reality

Progress continues on a parity bill that will provide for more equitable mental health insurance coverage. That would be a victory for millions of Americans living with mental illnesses who face unfair discrimination in co-payments, doctor's visits and hospital stays. The Senate and House are now working on resolving differences in their respective bills so that it may be passed on to Congress.

Both the House and Senate insurance parity bills (HR 1424 and S 558) have a number of elements in common. They both broaden the modest 1996 Mental Health parity Act (which required parity only for annual and lifetime dollar limits) by adding equitable coverage requirements for mental illness treatment with respect to durational treatment limits and financial limitations. They also include both mental illness and substance abuse in the coverage requirements. They apply parity standards to fully insured plans regulated by the states and ERISA self-insured plans that are exempt from state regulation.

These similarities create enormous potential for quickly reconciling the Senate and House bills to ensure prompt action by Congress in the fall. President Bush has signaled support for federal parity legislation, and signed the Texas parity law in 1997.

However, there are still differences between the bills that must be resolved by the sponsors and the broad coalition of groups and interests now supporting parity. Those include the scope of mental health benefits, out-of-network coverage and preemption of existing state parity and mandated benefit laws.

To find this information on federal parity legislation, and keep up-to-date on the latest progress of the bills, visit the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Web site at www.nami.org.



New Study by NIMH Produces Findings on Autism Diagnosis

A study by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) has found that about half of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) can be diagnosed soon after their first birthday, while others with the disorder may appear to develop normally until that age and then falter or regress during their second year. Their study is the first to identify two such distinct patterns of illness onset by following the development of toddlers at risk.

The researchers hope to develop criteria for clinicians to use in diagnosing ASDs in one-year-olds, since early intervention holds the best hope for a better outcome. The disorders are still rarely diagnosed before age three.

Affecting about one in 150 children, ASDs are characterized by impairments in language, communication skills, and the ability to relate to others. Accordingly, the team followed the development of social and communication skills from ages 14 to 36 months in 107 infants who had siblings with the disorder -- and were therefore deemed at high risk. They also tracked 18 low risk healthy controls from unaffected families.

By the end of the study, 30 of the high risk children were diagnosed with ASDs. Half of these children had developed marked signs of disturbed sociability and play behavior by 14 months. These children exhibited lags in development on multiple measures early on. They rarely initiated communications or shared experiences with others, missed social cues, and displayed a limited repertoire of words and gestures. Social engagement became rare and fleeting.

In contrast to this early-diagnosis group, a later-diagnosis group showed a very different course. At 14 months, they were distinguishable from healthy children only in that they shifted their gaze less between objects and a person's eyes. However, their social functioning subsequently deteriorated so that by two years, these children behaved similarly to the early-diagnosis group.

The researchers note that children in the later-diagnosis group would likely pass a screening at 14 months, underscoring the importance of re-screenings at age two. The study emphasizes the importance of more frequent assessments for children with ASDs symptomatic behavior.

Three Alabamians Travel to China to Compete in Special Olympics World Games

Three Special Olympics athletes from Alabama are now on the trip of a lifetime. Diwandalon Cannon of Tuscaloosa, Cody Chunn of Somerville, and Tonya Pitts of Uniontown, were selected to compete on the U.S. team at the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games in Shanghai, China. The games started October 2 and will run until October 11, 2007.

All three athletes will compete in the sport of "athletics," which includes sprint, middle-distance race, marathon, high jump, shot put, long jump, relay and pentathlon. Walking races and throwing events are designed for athletes with lesser physical capabilities. Athletics is the most popular event at the Special Olympic Games.

To be considered for this opportunity, all three competed in the spring Alabama Summer Games in the sport of athletics. They all won a gold medal in their divisions. From there, names of all state gold medal winners were put in a hat, and Diwandalon, Cody and Tonya were drawn at random to join the U.S. team.

The vision for the 2007 Special Olympics World Summer Games is to embrace the diversity of all individuals' abilities worldwide and celebrate all differences. This spirit of unity on the playing fields, in families and communities throughout the world makes for a better way of life for all. Special Olympics internationally serves more than 2.25 million persons with intellectual disabilities in more than 200 Programs in more than 160 countries.

Special Olympics Alabama offers year-round sports training and competition in 20 sports on local and state levels for more than 14,500 children and adults with intellectual disabilities. Visit www.specialolympicsalabama.org for more information about Special Olympics Alabama.



Diwandalon Ciara Cannon is from Tuscaloosa, and has been competing in athletics in the Special Olympics for 6 years. She is looking forward to traveling to China for the World Games and is most proud of winning the state championship in May 2006. Wanda likes to listen to music and watch "Spongebob Squarepants."



Cody Leanston Chunn lives in Somerville and competes in athletics, basketball and volleyball through Special Olympics. He considers his selection for the World Games team as an experience of a lifetime. Cody enjoys playing games and working on cars.

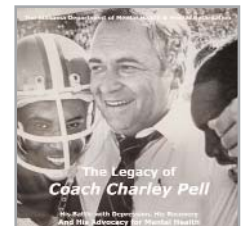


Tonya Mashelle Pitts resides in Uniontown and has been involved in Special Olympics for 8 years, competing in athletics and basketball. She is looking forward to the World Games so she can travel outside the U.S. and meet other people. She has received many regional awards from Special Olympics. She enjoys playing games on the computer.

Charley Pell Golf Tournament Provides Opportunity to Deliver Important Message

The skies may have been cloudy, but that didn't dampen the good time had by all at the recent Charley Pell Golf Tournament, held September 21 in Tuscaloosa. A full slate of teams filled up the golf course, and the winner of the Commissioner's Cup was the Bryce team of Charles Cutts, Ken Butler, Chuck Johnson and Heath Haley. We would like to congratulate the team, and say thank you to all the teams who participated in this year's tournament. The money raised will go to fund anti-stigma efforts within the department.

One such anti-stigma effort is the *Legacy of Charley Pell*, a video that traces the story of Charley's battle with depression and his recovery. After a crisis point in his struggle, he obtained treatment and became a crusader for people with mental illnesses. At this time, the Office of Public Information and Community Relations is working to mass produce the videos. If you would like copies of the video to use for community presentations, etc., they will be available free of charge (in reasonable quantities) by contacting the office at (334) 242-3417.



Partlow Employees Help Fight Fire

On August 14, 2007, the Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue Service began receiving calls of brushfires all along the railroad tracks stretching from the Partlow facility for several miles. There were separate fires along the track, and several of their units were called to the scene. A large fire that was moving toward Partlow was reported by an employee. By the time the Fire and Rescue Service arrived, flames were in excess of 30 feet high, threatening the southernmost part of Partlow's campus. In an effort to protect the most vulnerable building, the team set up operations to battle the blaze. They soon had to move to reestablish secondary operations elsewhere. This is where the employees of Partlow stepped in.

Upon noticing the difficulty of the task a crew of four men were undertaking in re-establishing operations further down the fire line, some Partlow maintenance team members and corrections officers swarmed in to assist; pulling hoses, establishing a water supply and actually fighting fires along side members of the Tuscaloosa Fire and Rescue Service. Lieutenant Harbin said that, "It is through their selfless action and bravery that we were able to contain the fire and extinguish it." He goes on to say, "This type of dedication and intestinal fortitude cannot be taught, but it is instilled from within the heart. It has been a while since I have seen such unselfish bravery from private citizens." In conclusion, the Lieutenant commended those who participated in the events of that day, and in a letter to the Human Resources department at Partlow he stated, "You should be proud and honored to be a part of such a fine organization with such dedicated and professional team members."

Maintenance Team Members

Paul Babb	Ken Hopkins, Supervisor	Curtis Rose
John Davis, Manager	Bobby Jacobs	Ray Seals
Rayburn Edmonds	Dennis Jacobs	Ernest Smith
Donald Griffin	Larry Kennedy	Marsha Stough
Marvin Hardin	Leon Rankin	

Corrections Officers

Jeremy Blackwood	Danielle Grant	Michael Richards
Russell Davis	Gerald Marshall	Jeremy Thrasher

Dr. Bisbee Retires After 33 Years with the Department

As it read on his commendation from the Governor, "There are untold thousands of staff, consumers and family members whose lives have been indelibly and positively impacted by the leadership, initiative and professional wisdom of Dr. Bisbee." The department seconds that statement and recently said goodbye to Dr. Bisbee, as he retired after 33 years of service.

Throughout his career, Dr. Bisbee served in a variety of administrative and clinical positions within department facilities, beginning his career at Bryce Hospital in 1974 as a Psychologist. His last position at the department was based in central office headquarters in Montgomery, but he never stayed behind his desk for too long. As the Director of Mental Illness Facilities, Dr. Bisbee would regularly visit the facilities, providing leadership in maintaining certification and/or accreditation, and maintaining the highest standards of care for consumers.

The admiration held by so many for Dr. Bisbee was apparent at his retirement celebration, as many shared stories about working with him. Gifts were presented to Dr. Bisbee, including the above mentioned commendation from Governor Riley, two architectural drawings of Searcy Hospital, and a picture drawn by well-known consumer Mr. Calloway. We appreciate the dedicated service Dr. Bisbee gave to the department, and we wish him the best in his future endeavors.



Commissioner Houston presents Dr. Bisbee with a commendation from the Governor.

Bell-Shambley and Cutts Appointed to New Positions

Charles Cutts and Dr. Beverly Bell-Shambley were recently appointed as the Facility Director at Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa, and Director of Mental Illness Facilities at the central office in Montgomery, respectively.

Charles Cutts will be head of the oldest publicly operated mental illness facility in Alabama at Bryce Hospital. Bryce Hospital is responsible for the provision of regional inpatient psychiatric services for adults, serving a specified region in the north central part of the state. It also provides inpatient services for adolescents serving the entire state. Mr. Cutts most recently served as the Facility Director at North Alabama Regional Hospital in the Decatur area, a position he held since July of 2001. Before that, he served in a multitude of positions at various facilities throughout the state, and has been with the department for more than 30 years.



Charles Cutts



Dr. Beverly Bell-Shambley

Cutts is a Certified Public Manager, with a bachelor's degree in health and physical education from Stillman College and a master's degree in health and recreation from the University of Alabama.

Dr. Beverly Bell-Shambley is a licensed clinical psychologist, a certified forensic examiner and a licensed nursing home administrator with 22 years of experience with the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. Bell-Shambley completed her doctoral training at the University of Georgia. She began her career at Taylor Hardin Secure Medical Facility in Tuscaloosa in 1985 as a Staff Psychologist before transferring to Bryce Hospital in Tuscaloosa as the Director of Neuropsychology Services. She returned to Taylor Hardin in 1994 as Clinical Director until she went back to Bryce Hospital in 2001 as Administrator of the S.D. Allen Intermediate Care Facility. In 2003, she was appointed Facility Director at Mary Starke Harper Geriatric Psychiatry Center, also in Tuscaloosa.

In her role as Director of MI Facilities, Bell-Shambley will supervise the operation of all state facilities under the mental illness division of the department.

September Marked the 18th Annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month

During the month of September, groups nationwide hosted Recovery Celebrations that highlighted the societal and personal costs/benefits of substance abuse disorder treatment and recovery. The month of September was designated as the 18th annual National Alcohol and Drug Addiction Recovery Month (Recovery Month). This year's Recovery Month theme was "Join the Voices for Recovery: Saving Lives, Saving Dollars." The celebrations recognized the positive impact of investing in treatment and recovery on individuals, families and the community.

More than 74 percent of Americans say that alcohol addiction has had some impact on them at some point in their lives, whether it was their own addiction, or that of a friend, family member, or associate.

There are an estimated 300,000 Alabamians with substance addiction illness. The drugs of choice rank as follows: alcohol, marijuana, cocaine/crack and methamphetamine. In Alabama, the Governor proclaimed September 2007, Recovery Month in Alabama, and Sunday, September 16, was designated by the Substance Abuse Advocacy Task Force as Recovery Sunday. Groups throughout the state held community events to celebrate individuals in recovery and the treatment professionals who have helped them reclaim their lives.



From left to right: Rev. Edward J. Nettles, Sr., Dr. H. Westley Clark, M.D., and David Battle talk after a Recovery Sunday event held at Freewill Missionary Baptist Church. Battle, who was the keynote speaker at the event, is a former Auburn University football player who is now in recovery from substance abuse addiction. Dr. Clark is the national head of the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment in Washington, D.C.

Associate Commissioner for Substance Abuse Services Shares Progress

National Alcohol and Substance Addiction Recovery Month, held annually in the month of September, brought a good deal of attention to the issue of addiction, as noted in the previous article. Kent Hunt, Associate Commissioner for Substance Abuse Services in the department recently offered additional insight on many of the projects going on in his division that will enhance the quality of services across the state.

To help bring attention to substance abuse issues, including the need for increased funding and anti-stigma efforts, the division has encouraged the development of more advocacy groups throughout the state. Hunt said that their long-term goal is to have active advocacy groups in every county. To help reach this goal, division staff are helping advocacy groups with recruitment and training.

Other goals include implementing standardized outcome measurements and expanding the delivery of evidence-based substance abuse prevention and treatment services. Statistics have already been collected from every contract provider, and analyzation of those numbers is now in process. The Systems Improvement Initiative will help to expand levels of care to include more services such as early intervention and outpatient detox programs. Standards are being formalized now for this initiative, and uniform screening and assessment instruments have already been adopted. Ongoing efforts should enable the department to track a dollar to a program, to an individual, and to an outcome. This will bring greater accountability to the system and allow the department to share the components of the most successful outcome-based practices with all providers.



As part of National Recovery Month, a Rally for Recovery was held in Birmingham to bring attention to substance addiction treatment needs.

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